Some academics and policy analysts describe the current global interest in Sub-Saharan Africa as a new “scramble,” emphasizing how the region’s great potential has led to renewed fervor from external actors. On a continent where 70% of the population is under 30 years old, Sub-Saharan Africa is the world's youngest region, yet its connectivity remains limited, with only 40% having internet access as of 2022. While its resource wealth, including significant oil reserves and the production of several critical minerals, highlights the region’s international importance, its agency is often overlooked. Indeed, the very term “scramble” fails to acknowledge the active role of African states, leaders, and people who contribute to their own political, economic, and social development.

Africa is more than a landscape for geopolitics to occur: its people actively shape political, economic, and social dynamics that extend far beyond their national borders. Yet, the continent is at a crossroads geopolitically: heightened competition brings new interests and opportunities to the region, but rivalry among international actors with strong strategic interests can also imperil domestic institutional growth and stability. What is the current U.S. strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa? What are the foreign policy strategies and tools of influence that other extra-regional actors are using? How can the U.S. develop innovative strategies to reshape its engagement with Sub-Saharan Africa to advance mutual interests while also encouraging sustainable development?

Proposed Topics and Questions for Discussion

- The readings below have links, but they may be behind a pay wall. If so, obtain them through your institution’s library.

Who are the main extra-regional actors in Sub-Saharan Africa and how do their strategies challenge or support U.S. foreign policy objectives?

What is the current U.S. strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa? What are China’s and Russia’s strategies and which tools of foreign policy influence do they tend to rely on most heavily? What are the roles of U.S. NATO allies and former colonial powers, especially France and the UK? What challenges do they face with maintaining their historical relationships? How are other actors like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey competing in Africa, and what implications do these rivalries have for the U.S.?


SCUSA 74 Roundtable Topic: Opportunities and Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa


**What are new opportunities and pathways for US engagement?**

What innovative approaches and foreign policy tools might the U.S. employ in order to achieve its goals in the face of competing actors? How can the U.S. ensure that its foreign policy with regard to Africa transcends great power competition and builds sustainable partnerships based on mutual interests and shared visions of the future?

How can the U.S. continue to improve its security cooperation programs to enable partners to effectively combat endemic and emerging security threats? How can the U.S. capitalize on these military-to-military ties to expand its foreign policy influence in the region, all while ensuring that its actions contribute to stability rather than imperiling it? Beyond security sector assistance, how can the U.S. leverage development assistance to combat insecurity at its roots? In addition to aid, how can the U.S. facilitate equitable conditions for American investors, enabling them to effectively compete with China and other states? In which sectors, should the U.S. prioritize investment to advance its objectives in Africa?

Despite technological advancements, interpersonal interactions remain crucial for fostering trust-based relationships. How can the U.S. modernize traditional diplomacy to align with shifting goals and new platforms? What should be the role of people-to-people diplomacy be? To what extent do diaspora populations or private religious communities amplify or counter US influence? What steps can the U.S. and its African partners take to address youth grievances, ensuring their active participation in democratic processes and minimizing their susceptibility to extremist recruitment? How can Africa leverage the potential for technological advancement to bypass traditional infrastructural limitations, enabling even rural populations to access advanced systems? To what degree can standalone or integrated employment of mobile technology, renewable energy, the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, and blockchain enhance...
healthcare, education, and financial services for the African population? How can the US and its allies contribute to ensuring democratic and inclusive technology use, promoting freedom of expression and economic opportunities?


